



BBC National
Orchestra and
Chorus of Wales

Cerddorfa
a Chorws
Cenedlaethol
Cymreig y BBC

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 5th July 2018

MUSIC AND ‘MAGNETISM’ – A CELEBRATION OF WALES’ PIONEERING FEMALE COMPOSER

BBC National Orchestra Wales performs Nocturne, by Morfydd Owen for the first time at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall

Today, the rights of women and feminist causes are leading the news agenda, but at the turn of the 20th Century, a similar pioneering movement was underway. Set against the rise of the Suffragettes and calls for greater rights for women, young Welsh composer Morfydd Llwyn Owen took the musical world by storm.

To celebrate the talent of such a pivotal figure in Welsh music, on 20th July as part of BBC Proms, BBC NOW will commemorate the centenary of Morfydd Owen’s death on 7 September 1918, aged 26, by performing her music at the Royal Albert Hall conducted by Principal Conductor **Thomas Søndergård**. The chosen work is **Nocturne**, for which Morfydd was awarded the Charles Lucas Silver Medal at the Royal Academy of Music in 1913. It will be the first time that **Nocturne** will be included in the BBC Proms programme.

Morfydd Owen’s legacy lives on and has transcended more than just music. She moved to London in 1912 to study composition at the Royal Academy of Music, at a time when it was widely recognised to be very difficult for women to succeed and even more challenging for a provincial woman like Morfydd. However, she rose above the cultural and societal constraints of the time, making it much easier for other women to follow in her footsteps. including acclaimed female Welsh composers such as Grace Williams, who often cited Owen as her inspiration.

Morfydd Owen was the proud product of a country happy to celebrate the important role of women in the creative industries. This Welsh spirit followed her to London, where she was supported and warmly welcomed into the network of Welsh chapels and the wider London Welsh society. She was taken under the wing of Lady Herbert Lewis and David Lloyd George, who created opportunities for her to appear in concerts, and was commissioned to provide compositions by other Liberal M.P.s including Sir J. Herbert Lewis and Sir H. Haydn Jones.

By the time of her early death in 1918, Morfydd Owen, had already completed 250 pieces. Her impact on Welsh music and her influence continues to grow in popularity in Wales and internationally, with overseas performances including a Morfydd Owen Festival in Winnipeg in 1999.

Dr Rhian Davies, Artistic Director of the Gregynog Festival, who completed her PhD about the life and work of Morfydd Owen, said: “I’m delighted that *Nocturne* is representing Welsh composition at this year’s BBC Proms, commemorating the centenary of Morfydd Owen’s death and marking 101 years since her song *For Jeannie’s Sake* was performed at a Promenade Concert by Robert Radford and Frederick Kiddle in 1917.

Morfydd was a trailblazer in every way so it's really special and appropriate to include her in a Proms season that honours women composers."

Thomas Søndergård, conductor for BBC NOW and BBC Proms 8, said: "I am delighted to be involved in this special event and am looking forward to performing one of Morfydd Owen's most distinctive and original pieces of work. *Nocturne* is a confident, clever, spirited and quirky piece of music. I am sure that the Orchestra will relish the opportunity to play this iconic piece and celebrate the talents of this remarkable musician."

BBC NOW performs five concerts at the **BBC Proms** beginning on **20 July**, conducted by **Thomas Søndergård** and taking in music by Lili Boulanger and Welsh composer Morfydd Owen, who died in 1918. On **22 July**, the orchestra performs alongside no fewer than five choirs in Mahler's *Symphony No. 8 'Symphony of a Thousand'* which marks the last performance of **Thomas Søndergård** as BBC NOW's Principal Conductor. On **27 July**, **Martyn Brabbins** conducts a centenary celebration of Parry, alongside music by Vaughan Williams and Holst. The orchestra's final concert at the Royal Albert Hall for the season takes in music by Dame Ethel Smyth, Dvořák and Richard Strauss on **1 August**, conducted by **Otto Tausk**. BBC NOW joins in the annual spectacular Last Night of the Proms celebrations on **8 September** with **BBC Proms in the Park Wales** in **Colwyn Bay**.

-ENDS-

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Notes to Editors

A Welsh language version of the press release is available.

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BBC National Orchestra of Wales

For 90 years, BBC NOW has played an integral role in the cultural landscape of Wales and occupies a unique role as both broadcast and national symphony orchestra. The orchestra performs a busy schedule of live concerts throughout Wales and the UK, led by its artistic team Principal Conductor Thomas Søndergård, Principal Guest Conductor Xian Zhang, Conductor Laureate Tadaaki Otaka and Composer-in-Association Huw Watkins. Part of BBC Wales and generously supported by the Arts Council of Wales, the Orchestra is an ambassador of Welsh music, championing contemporary composers and musicians.

Performances can be heard regularly across the BBC, on Radio 3, Radio Wales and Radio Cymru, and the orchestra performs annually at the BBC Proms and biennially at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. Building on its extensive work with Special Educational Needs schools, BBC NOW performed the first ever Relaxed Prom in 2017, which won the 2018 Fantastic for Families Award for Best Family Event.

In 2015, the Orchestra toured South America, visiting Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, as well as the Welsh colony in Patagonia where musicians worked in schools and with the community – its most ambitious tour to date. In December 2018, BBC NOW will tour to China with Principal Guest Conductor Xian Zhang.

The Orchestra's home is BBC Hoddinott Hall in Cardiff Bay, where BBC NOW continues its work as one of the UK's foremost soundtrack orchestra including Doctor Who, War and Peace, Hollow Crown and David Attenborough's Life Story. Recent television performances include the BBC Four series, Tunes for Tyrants presented by Suzy Klein and Rhod Gilbert's Work Experience: Classical Musician.

www.bbc.co.uk/bbcnow

BBC Orchestras and Choirs

The BBC's Orchestras and Choirs each play a unique role in British cultural life. Based in Cardiff, Glasgow, London and Salford, the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Philharmonic, reach an audience of millions with their wide-ranging and distinctive programming. Performing with the world's leading conductors and soloists, the BBC Orchestras and Choirs give around 400 concerts a year in around 60 locations across the UK as well as touring worldwide. Contemporary music plays a central role in the musical life of each group, and every season includes a significant number of premieres, with many being commissioned by BBC Radio 3. The Orchestras and Choirs organise around 200 learning and outreach projects across the country, bringing music to tens of thousands of people of all ages across the UK. They are an integral part of the BBC's Ten Pieces, an initiative designed to encourage children to get creative with classical music and which has reached over 4 million people across the UK. The BBC Orchestras and Choirs are the backbone of the BBC Proms, collectively giving almost half of the concerts at the world's largest classical music festival.

BBC Radio 3

BBC Radio 3 broadcasts high-quality, distinctive classical music and cultural programming, alongside regular arts and ideas programmes, jazz and world music. The station features more live classical music programming than any other and is the home of the BBC Proms - broadcasting every Prom live and more than 600 complete concerts a year - alongside daily speech programming, 90 full-length operas, over 25 drama commissions and over 20 new BBC music commissions a year. Radio 3 is the most significant commissioner of new musical works in the country and is committed to supporting new talent, from composers to writers and new young performers, through schemes such as New Generation Artists and New Generation Thinkers. www.bbc.co.uk/radio3

BBC Proms: As the world's biggest classical music festival, the BBC Proms offers eight weeks of world-class music-making from a vast array of leading orchestras, conductors and soloists from the UK and around the world. Across more than 90 concerts – and a similar number of free events designed to extend and further enrich the audience's Proms experience – the festival aims to offer a summer of music that allows for the most diverse and exciting musical journeys. More than 120 years since it was founded, the driving factor in building a festival of this scale is to offer exceptional music-making at the lowest possible prices, continuing founder-conductor Henry Wood's original ambition of bringing the best classical music to the widest possible audience. With every Prom broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, available across multiplatform and many televised on the BBC, the Proms reaches far and beyond the Royal Albert Hall. The 2018 BBC Proms runs from Friday 13 July to Saturday 8 September 2018.